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How Should Christians Look at War?

A radio discussion over WGN and the Mutual Broadcasting System

THE REVEREND EDWARD V. CARDINAL

Director, Shiel School of Social Studies, Chicago

THE REVEREND G. EUGENE DURHAM

Director, Methodist Student Foundation, Northwestern University

JAMES O'NEILL

Chairman, Department of Speech, Brooklyn College Author, Religion and Education Under the Constitution

Moderator: JAMES H. McBURNEY

Dean, The School of Speech, Northwestern University

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How Should Christians Look at War?

MR. McBurney: As you gentlemen know, we are discussing the question, "How should Christians look at war?" How do you answer that question, Durham?

REVEREND DURHAM: I believe that Christians should oppose war because it is evil. War counts upon the outpouring of passion and hatred, while a Christian stands against evil, with a method of love.

Use of Force

A war is a use of force in personal relationships which makes it impossible to have good will relationships toward the personality of your enemy. In the first place, you are trying to kill him, and thus put him out of all relationship with yourself.

In the second place, modern killing is wholesale, and often impersonal. In the third place, war also poisons personal relations at their roots, namely, through lying and trickery and subterfuge, and if Christ—Who is certainly the norm in the Christian's life—be in any valid sense "the way and the truth," then certain other ways of living and accounting are not the way. It would seem to me that war definitely contradicts Christ's way.

The mission of the Christian church on earth is to spread the spirit of Christ, a chief element of which is self-giving love, so that men will love God with all their heart and soul, mind and strength, and will love their fellow men. The Christian church has the responsibility to bear witness to the way men ought to live, and the Christian is committed to the fact that of all the methods of dealing with sin, the way of meeting evil with good works better than any other.

The weapon God uses against evil is the weapon of reconciliation, of a love that led to a cross.

MR. McBurney: You are saying, then, Durham, that war is an evil thing from a Christian point of view, and that Christians should oppose it; is that right?

REVEREND DURHAM: That is right; I certainly am.

Mr. McBurney: Do you go along with that, O'Neill?

Mr. O'NEILL: Not entirely, no. I believe that most of the things he says are the proper objectives of Christianity are such. However, I don't think there is any general principle that is consistent with Christianity that you can apply universally and say all wars are good or all wars are bad. I think every war has to be looked at according to its own circumstances, and I think that just as the individual is justified in using force to defend himself and his wife and children, so the nation is justified in using force to defend itself against the aggressor.

'Right of Survival'

You can't use love and good will on the enemy after he has killed you and your family. You have got to survive in order to have a chance to use the weapons of Christianity, and you have a right to try to survive against those who would destroy you and your way of life.

MR. McBurney: Now, before Durham replies, let's have Father Cardinal's view on this.

FATHER CARDINAL: Mr. Durham mentioned the Bible in his defense of his position. I find it extremely difficult

to get any clear-cut statement on this thing when we look at the Bible as a source, because the Bible says that our Lord came not to bring peace but the sword. St. Peter and St. Paul both commend the lawful authority of the magistrate in a way that would suggest that they did not understand our Lord to condemn all use of the sword.

And then when we look at the early centuries of Christianity, we find that a number of soldiers were received into the Church, and their relatives were not ashamed to note it on their epitaphs.

Then we had St. Athanasius, who said it was forbidden to kill; nevertheless, in war it was lawful and praiseworthy to kill one's enemies. Further, great rewards were decreed to those who were distinguished in war.

Take the statement of the Lord, "If I have spoken evil, give testimony of the evil, but if well, why strikest thou me?" If we look only at the words, He did not in this obey His own precept, for He did not turn another part of His face to him who had struck Him, but on the contrary, prevented him who had done the wrong from adding thereto.

So I would say it is extremely difficult to get a clear-cut statement such as you made with reference to this whole problem, from the Bible.

Sermon on the Mount

REVEREND DURHAM: Well, Father Cardinal, what you point out is interesting, all right, and I am interested in what St. Athanasius says, but I go back to Jesus and some of the other sayings of His, and the whole spirit of Jesus.

Turn to the Sermon on the Mount and you find him saying, "You have heard that it was said you shall love your neighbors and hate your enemy, but I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father Who is in Heaven."

Then He goes on, as you remember,

in the last of that chapter to say, "You therefore must be perfect in love as your Heavenly Father is perfect."

In another place Jesus is saying, "Be merciful as your Father is merciful." It seems to me that the spirit of the Master is the thing that we are to follow when he says "Follow me," and I can't imagine Jesus using a bayonet or dropping a bomb.

FATHER CARDINAL: You have given text and I have given text. The result is that it is very, very difficult to get a clear statement one way or the other.

In other words, we don't have from the pen of Christ—because he did not write—nor do we have a specific statement of the thing in the Gospels, so we must have recourse to those whose function was to interpret the teachings of Christ.

MR. McBurney: Let's turn to some of those interpreters, Father, in an attempt to find out what, in your opinion, would constitute a just war.

FATHER CARDINAL: Well, to me, one of the greatest interpreters of the Thomas mind of Christ was St. Aquinas, and St. Thomas Aquinas lays down certain conditions which he says would justify a war. One of these conditions is that this war shall be undertaken by the lawful authority, that it shall be undertaken for the vindication of an undoubted and proportionate right that has certainly been infringed, and then it shall be a last resort, all peaceful means of settlement having been tried in vain, and that the good to be achieved shall outweigh the evils that war will involve and that there shall be a reasonable hope of victory for justice.

Principles of Christ

These are the conditions which St Thomas Aquinas lays down for the beginning of a just war, and I think in the application of the principles of Christ, churchmen—at least Cath olic theologians—have always based their teachings on St. Thomas Aquinas.

REVEREND DURHAM: But today can you get good ends out of the means of war? The feeling is you get nothing but destruction. You use lying, you use hatred, you use bitterness, you use falsehood, you use all other means that you and I would certainly not call Christian to fight a war.

MR. McBurney: What Durham is saying, in substance, is that war is a self-defeating thing, I think.

REVEREND DURHAM: Yes.

MR. McBurney: What is your view on that?

MR. O'NEILL: I disagree with it. I think that war is a thing to be avoided in every possible case, but that "no good can come of war" or that "no good has come of war"—I do not accept.

'Justifiable Wars'

I think in this country we have had eminently justifiable wars. For instance, there was the Revolutionary War: I think the fruit of it has been great good, even to England, which was defeated in it. I think both England and America have profited from the Revolutionary War, and are profiting from it today. I think, further, that even in the last World Warwhich was more destructive, and the fruits of which were probably more disappointing than those of any other war-we in civilization are better off today on account of the last World War because Hitler was defeated, and I think his victory over the world would have been worse than anything that has followed the second World War.

FATHER CARDINAL: I think we are faced with this terrible alternative such as the people in the Middle Ages were: An enemy which has a philosophy that is intrinsically evil.

In the Middle Ages the Pope called for the Crusades. Why did he call for the Crusades? Because Christianity was threatened, civilization was threatened. People from all Western Europe tramped across one country after another in order to come to the defense of the Holy Land.

Well, I would take it from that that the Church sees that under certain circumstances it is better for us to make tremendous sacrifices than to submit to an enemy who is, from our way of thinking, intrinsically bad.

Mr. McBurney: You are saying that the present circumstances might very well call for a new Crusade?

FATHER CARDINAL: Yes.

MR. McBurney: And that this new enemy is international Communism?

FATHER CARDINAL: That is right.

Mr. McBurney: Is that what you have in mind?

FATHER CARDINAL: Exactly.

REVEREND DURHAM: Father Cardinal, it seems to me that when a nation claims it is fighting a holy war, it is claiming that its ends are God's, but that its methods are its own.

FATHER CARDINAL: Well, of course, where do you get the methods? The methods are the methods that nature has given you to use, and we have to use the violent methods, of course—as St. Thomas Aquinas says—only as the last extremity.

We must try to make use of negotiations. We must try to make use of people so that all possible efforts are used in order to avoid the disasters of war.

REVEREND DURHAM: But it seems to me that, as confessing Christians, we ought not to give the impression that without a sword we are defenseless, because the power of the spirit is the power on which we have relied down through the ages. The only thing that could outmatch the sin of the world was not a might that could destroy, but a love that could not be destroyed.

Threat of Communism

MR. O'NEILL: I think that the threat of world Communism in the world today is unique, at least it is unique in any of the histories immediately before us that are all relevant to our situation, and I think the defense of

Christianity and civilization against that threat is something to which every Christian owes allegiance. firmly believe that if Russia should start a war against us and we should say we are Christians, and therefore we won't fight, and tell them "Come in and take over the country," then I think that in twenty years Christianity and the civilization and the institutions of this land would totally disappear and be succeeded by the dictatorship of the Russian tyrants. I think that is worse than anything that could come from a third World War.

REVEREND DURHAM: Professor O'Neill, you know very well that Christianity has faced dictatorships and tyrants and oppression before, and certainly, if you believe that Christianity is God working in the world, you know that God is not going to be destroyed.

MR. O'NEILL: I think God is working in the world through His servants in the human race, and that they ought to live up to the obligation.

FATHER CARDINAL: Dr. Durham, I'd like to put this question to you. You say war is evil. Well, supposing that everybody in the United States would agree with your position. We would have here in the United States 150,000,000 people who would refuse to fight. Now, I wonder just what the Soviet government would do in such a situation. I am very much afraid, judging from their record, that they would take advantage of us, and say, "Well, this fruit is ready to pluck; we had better take advantage of this."

Army Protection

It seems to me that although we respect your position, your position can be maintained only because there is an army in the United States, or we hope that there will be an army in the United States that will help to protect your rights.

REVEREND DURHAM: Well, I believe that we are going to be much safer if we don't have an army in the United States, or an army anywhere else. I hope the President pushes, for all it's worth, this suggestion he made before the United Nations that we must have world disarmament.

FATHER CARDINAL: You mean meeting strength with strength. The President said that. We have to meet strength with strength. In other words, when Russia is strong, the only effective opposition we can give Russia—the only thing she will respect—will be the strength that we have.

REVEREND DURHAM: Well, wasn't it at Potsdam (it seems to me that it was there) that Mr. Stalin and Mr. Truman were talking, and Mr. Truman was telling about the Pope's attitude toward war and toward Russian aggression? And unless I'm mistaken, Stalin came back with a question something like this: "How many divisions does the Pope have?"

You and I know that the Pope isn't relying on that kind of power. The power he is relying on is the power of the spirit.

Now, coming back to your question about a situation in the United States where we would all refuse to fight, there must be more than just refusing to fight. There must be that good will toward other people. There must be the desire to put into the construction of other countries the money that we would put into the destruction of other countries. It seems to me that has to go with the things I am saying.

Good Will

FATHER CARDINAL: But just think of the amount of good will that we have shown toward Russia, Soviet Russia—the tremendous amount. We offered them the Marshall Plan, for instance, and they refused that. We invited Mr. Stalin to come to Washington to confer with the President on these problems, and he has refused that. We have taken a thousand and one opportunities of showing the Soviet people that we are friendly.

MR. McBurney: Durham, do you think—in spite of the things that Father Cardinal has just outlined of things that we have done—that the Russians genuinely fear us?

REVEREND DURHAM: I am driven to feel that way, because I don't see any way that we could whip up opposition to Russia here if it were not basically for fear of Russia; and I think that they are using the same methods to fight us, because they have plenty of examples to use, you know. They can point to the way we have gone clear outside the borders of our state, just as they have, to make satellites of people, only we are trying to make satellites right on the edge of their country, or as close to them as we can get, and we have air bases around the world. You will remember we were calling for air bases across the Pacific.

Now, what does Russia think we want air bases for? Not for passenger service, certainly. And why wouldn't she be afraid? I think she probably is very definitely afraid of us, just as we are afraid of her.

MR. MCBURNEY: In terms of the criteria laid down by St. Thomas Aquinas, you are saying, in substance, then, that we have not properly evoked all peaceful methods of dealing with Russia, short of war?

REVEREND DURHAM: Oh, I think that is true. We have not. I think these gentlemen feel we haven't, either, or we wouldn't still be negotiating.

MR. O'NEILL: It seems to me that we haven't the kind of enemy in Russia that Mr. Durham is talking about. I think we have the most concrete reasons, evidence, in the history of Russia since the close of the last war, for being very much afraid of their purposes throughout the world.

I don't think they had any realistic basis for fear of us.

Treatment of Satellites

I should like to know, for instance, what country has been taken over by the United States and made a satellite? Where are the countries that we have treated the way Russia has treated Poland, Latvia, Rumania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia? Where have we done that?

They have done it. They have moved in to countries and, with the aid of a handful of well-armed men, they have taken over and imprisoned and executed the people who opposed them. Has America done anything like that? Why shouldn't we fear a country that does that wherever it has a chance? And why should they fear us when we are doing the opposite?

We offered the countries help. We offered the Marshall Plan. To say that we are doing what they are doing seems to me rather farfetched.

FATHER CARDINAL: I don't think it is so much a fear of the United States that the Russians have—they use that with their people, I suppose, for propaganda purposes—but it is part of their philosophy that the Soviet system will succeed only in the measure that the world is converted to it or forced into it, and that is why we fear Russia so much. I think we have to recognize that fact, because it is very, very fundamental in this whole struggle. It is a struggle of philosophies and may be more than that—a struggle for the survival of Christianity.

MR. MCBURNEY: Father Cardinal comes back to a point that has been made several times here—I think first by Mr. O'Neill—that we face a new kind of threat. I'd like to suggest another new thing under the sun that might affect the Christian attitude toward war, or, indeed, anyone's attitude toward war.

Is it possible that scientific developments are such that a new war, on a grand scale, is likely to end civilization as we know it, Mr. O'Neill? Maybe this is another new thing we ought to consider in debating an attitude toward war.

'End of Civilization'

MR. O'NEILL: I think there is a possibility that the atomic bomb and the hydrogen bomb and bacteriological warfare may end civilization as we know it. I think that is a possibility, and I think if we engage Russia—if they attack us and we fight instead of surrendering—we run the risk of that.

MR. McBurney: Would you run that risk?

MR. O'NEILL: I would run that risk, because, on the other hand, we are not running into a risk but are running into a certainty if Russia dominates the world. I'd rather take the chance than the certainty. As a Christian, if it is necessary to save the United States and civilization, I'd drop the atomic bomb without a moment's hesitation, as a last resort.

Mr. McBurney: Would you, Father Cardinal?

FATHER CARDINAL: First let me say that the French Cardinals, in a statement they made this summer, came out clearly against the use of the atomic bomb. They thought it was absolutely immoral, and their position was sustained by Father McCarthy, who teaches theology at Maynouth Seminary in Dublin.

On the other hand, we have the Dean of the School of Sacred Theology in Washington, Father Connell, who says that under certain circumstances, under an extreme circumstance, it would be morally justifiable

to drop the atomic bomb.

There we have the doctors disagreeing, and when the doctors disagree, then we are more or less in the position of making up our own minds on the whole thing, and my personal opinion would be that if all other means failed, and if we were sure that by dropping the atomic bomb on the Kremlin that we would save our own civilization and save Western Europe, then I think it would be justifiable.

Mr. McBurney: Would you ever be sure of that?

Contribution of Russia

REVEREND DURHAM: We are talking as though Russia isn't a part of our civilization today. Think of what Russia has contributed to us, and what we have contributed to Russia.

FATHER CARDINAL: Russia accepts a philosophy which is absolutely contrary to ours—fundamentally different. It is absolutely atheistic, and

consequently they are Enemy Number One.

REVEREND DURHAM: Well, just because they disagree with us in their philosophy, and particularly in their economics, is that any reason to feel that we can't live along with them?

FATHER CARDINAL: I don't think you should have brought in the problem of economics.

REVEREND DURHAM: Well, is there any reason that you can't live with those same people?

MR. O'NEILL: If they'd let you, I would.

FATHER CARDINAL: Yes. We have told the Soviet people time and time again that we are willing to remain on our side of the fence; we would say "live and let live" is our philosophy, but they are not willing to accept that kind of philosophy.

REVEREND DURHAM: No, I don't think this is the kind of a world where you can keep people on their side of the fence, they on their side and we on our side. It's the kind of world, it seems to me, where people have to live together, and certainly, basically, that is in the Christian doctrine too, wouldn't you say?

'Oil and Water'

FATHER CARDINAL: No, no; oil and water won't mix, and Russia and the United States are so different that it is a question of oil and water.

MR. O'NEILL: I don't think we are trying to take over Russia or to dominate their way of life, but I think that wherever they have a chance, they have taken over other countries and compelled them to follow the Communist way of life, whether those countries wanted to or not.

Russia has never won a plebiscite in a free election in its history, yet look at the countries they dominate! We are not trying to dominate them, and my point is that if they insist on dominating us, and attack us in order to carry out that purpose, then we should oppose them, that's all. I'm not for any Crusade—going in to Russia and making Russia conform to our economics or our theology.

REVEREND DURHAM: I am in favor of opposition to evil in Russia or evil in our own country, for we also have some very serious evil in our own country, in the way of discrimination, but the question that is before us today is the *method* we will use, and it seems to me that Christians have to oppose the way of war.

'War Immoral'

I was interested in a Catholic point of view as expressed by Edward Ingram Watkins, who is author of "Catholic Art and Culture," who wrote this in "The Catholic Peacemaker," published in England: "Even a just war must not be waged by immoral Under modern conditions. however," he goes on to say, "war can be waged only by such aerial bombing as must involve the slaughter and maining of innocent civilians. This, however, is plainly immoral. To kill the innocent is not a lawful means to any end, however good. Therefore," he says, "under modern conditions, no war can be waged without employing immoral means. Therefore, it must be unjustifiable."

Now, I agree with him.

FATHER CARDINAL: Well, that is the opinion of one man.

REVEREND DURHAM: That is true.

FATHER CARDINAL: I have already given you the opinion of two or three people who feel that the atomic bomb and these other means of killing people or defending ourselves could be morally defensible and morally justifiable.

MR. McBurney: Now I wonder if Durham, in the closing minutes here, would spell out in a little greater detail what course of action he would suggest. Are you suggesting that we might employ a more conciliatory attitude toward Russia in the interests of a peaceful settlement? Is that your point of view?

REVEREND DURHAM: Well, in the first place, I am saying that as Christians, all three of us gentlemen believe that there is only one God, and that He is God of the Russians as well as of ourselves, and that in the eyes of God, all people have significance. It seems to me that so often we—and every other country does the same thing—think in terms of using a method which will save perhaps as many lives of our folks as possible, knowing that it is going to take many, many lives of another people.

'The Christian Method'

Now, from the Christian standpoint, I seriously question that. I feel that the purpose and the method of Jesus—and that is my norm for saying the Christian method—is the method of seeking reconciliation with people through meetings around the conference table, through sharing our means and our skill and ability with them, and through good will toward them, and that we must follow that method.

We don't have to live, gentlemen. Jesus didn't have to live, either.

MR. McBurney: Durham has restated his position. In a sentence or two, may we have yours?

MR. O'NEILL: My position is that we should use all these methods of conference and help as far as they will work, but if we come to the point where the Russians are dominating the world and destroying Christianity and civilization, I think at that point we have no longer an opportunity of using them, and we should oppose them with everything we've got.

MR. McBurney: In a sentence or two, your closing position, Father?

FATHER CARDINAL: I think defense is one of the natural rights of man, and that time and again man, through the course of history, has had to defend himself, and that, possibly—unfortunately—the time will come again when he will have to have recourse to arms in order to preserve what he has.



Suggested Readings

Compiled by Eugen Eisenlohr and M. Helen Perkins, Reference Department, Deering Library, Northwestern University.



BRYN-JONES, DAVID. The Dilemma of the Idealist. New York, Macmillan, 1950.

The development of liberal thought during the past century with interesting conclusions as to the social and political obligations of anyone who accepts Christianity as a basis for a way of living.

The Church the Gospel and War. Edited by RUFUS M. JONES. New York, Harper, 1948.

Chapters by outstanding leaders of the day on religious attitudes toward war and peace, under the headings: "The Christian Pacifist Faith," and "The Position of the Church."

FOSDICK, HARRY EMERSON. A Great Time to Be Alive; Sermons on Christianity in War Time.

In chapter 4, "The Field Is Our World," Dr. Fosdick discusses war and emphasizes the price to be paid for peace. His suggestions for Christians follow in the chapter entitled, "Spiritual Foundations for a Better World."

LEE, UMPHREY. The Historic Church and Modern Pacifism. New York, Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1943.

Traces Jesus' testimony on peace and what the Church has thought on peace and war from ancient times to the present, ending with the author's own view that the Christian must at times act "as a judge or as a soldier."

MACGREGOR, GEORGE HOGARTH CARNABY. The New Testament Basis of Pacifism. London, Clarke, 1936.

A standard work on pacifism tracing the reasons why many Christian pacifists today believe that in a struggle with moral evil the way of the cross is more potent than the way of the sword.

MCLEOD, JAMES C. "Christian Citizens." (p. 223-236 in Fruits of Faith. J. RICHARD SPENN. New York, Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1940.)

A discussion of a dynamic Christianity which can reach out to the citizens of other countries.

MUSTE, ABRAHAM JOHN. Not by Might. New York, Harper, 1941.

A discussion of Christianity and pacifism in the atomic age by an outstanding pacifist.

NIEBUHR, REINHOLD. Christianity and Power Politics. New York, Scribner's, 1940.

Essays on many subjects, some secular and political, with the underlying thesis that the idea of participation in conflict is not at variance with the deepest understanding of the Christian religion.

PAGE, KIRBY. The Creative Revolution of Jesus: Then and Now. La Habra, Cal., The Author, 1950.

Lays down definite lines of action for the Christian and the Church in our present crisis.

POLING, DANIEL ALFRED. A Preacher Looks at War. New York, Macmillan, 1943.

Tells why he hates war and considers it a sin.

RAVEN, CHARLES E. War and the Christian. New York, Macmillan, 1938.

Thought provoking material under such headings as: "Is War Evil,"
"Pacifism and Practical Affairs," "Is There a Middle Way," etc.

RICHARDS, LAYTON. Christian Pacifism After Two World Wars. London, Independent Press, 1948.

A critical and constructive approach to the problem of the Christian outlook on war.

American Magazine 148:113, Dec., '49. "Good-Will Laboratory."

A unique research center originated by Professor Sorokin, Harvard sociologist, to find out how to make Christianity work on a scientific year-round basis. The Professor feels that the only answer to the atom bomb is the Sermon on the Mount.

Christian Century 66:1030-1, Sept. 7, '49. "How to Fight Communism."

A twelve-point program relating Christianity to the contemporary crisis, written by members of the faculty at Garrett Biblical Institute, the Methodist Theological Seminary on the campus of Northwestern University.

Christian Century 67:866-7, Jl. 19, '50. "Does the Church Want Peace?" M. NEIMOLLER.

Christians should no longer be rallied to violent solutions, but should see to it that every force for the creation of peace be put into operation.

Christian Century 67:326-8, Mar. 15, '50. "Trouble in the Peace Ranks." Discussion 67:436, 466, Apr. 5, 12, '50.

What the pacifist position has meant in war and peace.

Church Quarterly Review 145:1-11, Oct., '47. "Christian Citizenship; Some Reflections on St. Augustine, Ep. 138." L. HODGSON.

A discussion of whether war is justifiable, and if so, on what grounds.

Commonweal 51:214, Nov. 25, '49; Discussion 51:267-316, Dec. 9, 23, '49. "Conscientious Objection." Y. CONGAR.

A letter from Father Yyes Congar, O. P., which gives his views opposing the position of Catholics who want to register as unconditional conscientious objectors.

Fellowship 16:7-13, June, '50. "Love in Action." A. J. MUSTE.

A description of pacifist political strategy in the present world crisis.

The Friend 124: Nov. 30, '50. "The Quaker Spirit in the Secular World." G. BAILEY.

Suggests the possibility of a synthesis of the better characteristics of Christianity and Communism.

New York Times Magazine p. 7+, Jl. 16, '50. "Crusading Faith to Counter Communism." B. WARD.

Old patterns of history showing the reforms released within various countries or empires as the result of an outside challenge, as compared with trends in the U.S. today. The author concludes that only faith can counter Communism.

Vital Speeches 16:430-2, My. 1, '50. "In Defense of American Foreign Policy; What Pacifism Overlooks." R. N. BERKES.

Security will be found not in "flight from the specter of war, but in the vigilant preservation and eventual universalization of an adequately sustaining moral order."



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- ject the Welfare State?

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